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White Gloves at Five: Fraternal Patronage of London Theatres in the Eighteenth Century

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The particular London evening was Monday, 30 December 1728. The occasion was a performance of Betterton's alteration of Shakespeare's *King Henry IV: With the Humours of Sir John Falstaff and Justice Shallow,* King Henry by Elrington, with Colley Cibber as Justice Shallow. To the mainpiece was added, "At the Desire of several Persons of Quality," the pantomime, *Perseus and Andromeda.* And a note in the *Daily Journal* for that day identified these persons as Freemasons who planned to attend the theatre in an official body.

> . . . the Grand Master and Wardens and most of the Gentlemen present took Tickets to appear in White Gloves. . . . Part II is to be acted for their Entertainment; and it is said that a Prologue and Epilogue will be spoken suitable to the Occasion, and in honour of that Society.[1]

This announcement appears to be the earliest public notice of a curious and occasionally amusing factor in the stage history of the times. From this evening on, fraternal bodies appear more and more frequently as an important part of the theatrical scene, on-stage as well as in pit, box, and gallery. Despite the usual aura of secrecy which surrounds such groups, it is possible to learn their histories as they affected the playhouses of the century, and to find in them a counterpoint in the development of Augustan ideals of decency, decorum, and sentiment.

The revival of the ancient craft of Freemasonry, neglected in England since the days of Sir Thomas Gresham, Inigo Jones, and finally Sir Christopher Wren,[2] not only supported the neo-classical formulae for moulding attitudes toward religion, philanthropy, nationalism, education, manners and morality—even the abused word

[1] *The London Stage: Part 2: 1700-1729,* ed. Emmett L. Avery (Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), II, 1005; hereafter cited as *London Stage 2.*

[2] Gresham, a merchant and founder of the Royal Exchange, became Grand Master of England in 1567. Inigo Jones was so installed in 1635, Wren in 1698. The Fraternity was in a moribund state in later years when Wren's health failed; the revival was at his suggestion. (See "England," in Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences* (Philadelphia, 1917), p. 283.

"enthusiasm"—but also had an immediate and continuing effect upon the life of the London playhouses.

To fully understand the many public announcements of fraternal visitations to the theatres, and to estimate something of the impact such attendance had upon both sides of the stage curtain, it will help if we consider the briefest of histories concerning the craft of Freemasonry, its allies, and its enemies in these years.

On St. John the Baptist's Day, 24 June 1717, four Masonic lodges met at The Goose and Gridiron Alehouse in London, at the north end of St. Paul's, to form a Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in England. By 1721 there were twelve lodges represented in the new Grand Lodge; by 1723 the total was thirty member lodges.[3] Ireland formed a Grand Lodge in 1729, Scotland in 1736.[4] And such was the interest generated by the revived secret order, its brethren meeting the growing middle-class society on a simple but ostensibly democratic level, that membership was embraced actively by many prominent and highly-placed personages—lawyers and physicians, clergymen, writers, artists and theatre people, and especially the English merchant class. But if one part of the Town approved the Fraternity, other parts of Town assuredly did not, and there arose a number of imitative groups either capitalizing on the increasing prestige of Freemasonry or else appealing to the century's sense of satirical fun by caricature.

Thus in the early part of the century many rival "orders" appeared; and of those having to do with theatrical history we know them by exotic names—Gormogons, Mercurians, Gregorians, Scald Miserables, the Bucks, and—inevitably!—the "Ancients" and the "Moderns."

The Gormogons, established in 1724, insisted that no Freemason could be admitted until he was first "degraded" and had renounced the Masonic order. Its members were absurdly and intentionally pretentious, claiming in ridicule of Freemasons a descent from an ancient society in China.[5] Henry Carey had his fun with such a dispute in 1729:

> The Masons and the Gormogons
> Are laughing at one another.
> While all mankind are laughing at them;
> Then why do they make such a bother?

[3] H. L. Haywood, *Symbolical Masonry* (Kingsport, Tenn., 1923), p. 29.

[4] *Ibid.* Many members of Irish and Scottish lodges moved eventually to London and transferred memberships accordingly.

[5] Mackey, p. 356.

They bait their hooks for simple gulls,
And truth with bam they smother;
But when they've taken in their culls,
Why, then 'tis—Welcome, Brother![6]

And from the stage came a retort in a Masonic Prologue aimed at such imitators:

. . . . . .
And hence it is, the best alone can claim
The noblest character, a Mason's name.
And that the art, from other eyes conceal'd,
Remains a secret, as if ne'er reveal'd.
Let Cowans, therefore, and the upstart fry
Of Gormagons, our well earn'd praise deny.
Our secrets let them as they will deride;
For thus the fabled fox the grapes decry'd;
While we, superior to their malice live,
And freely their conjectures wild forgive.[7]

The Gregorians, organized early in Queen Anne's reign, also ridiculed the pretentions of Freemasonry. A performance of Mrs. Centlivre's *The Gamester* and Robert Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* at Covent Garden Theatre, 30 April 1741, advertised entr'acte singing which included *"Britons Strike Home* (by Desire of the Brethren) by Leveridge and Salway . . . *The Gregorian Song* . . . For the Entertainment of the Grand, the Vice-Grand, and the Brethren of the Ancient and Honourable Order of Gregorians. Benefit James. . . ."[8] And while the Gormogons flourished but a very few years, these Gregorians remained a distinctive group until the end of the century, when Mackey records a "Sermon preached before them in 1797." He then adds: "They must too, by that time, have changed their character, for Prince William Frederick of Gloucester was then their presiding officer; and Dr. Munkhouse, the author of that sermon, who was a very ardent Mason, speaks in high terms of the Order as an ally of Freemasonry, and distinguished for its 'benign tendency, and salutary effects.' "[9] Perhaps the name "The Gregorians" derived from their customary meeting place? In 1797 there is record of a Lodge of Sincerity No. 231, F. & A. M., meeting at the Gregorian Arms,

[6] "The Moderator between the Freemasons and the Gormogons." *The Poems of Henry Carey*, ed. F. T. Wood (London, n.d. [1930]), p. 118.

[7] Stephen Jones, *Masonic Miscellanies, in Poetry and Prose* (London, 1797), Prologue XIII, p. 174. (Extensive quotation from this little volume is by the courtesy of Folger Shakespeare Library, Dr. Louis B. Wright, Director.)

[8] *The London Stage: Part 3: 1729-1747*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), II, 912; hereafter cited as *London Stage 3*.

[9] Mackey, p. 366. The Reverend Dr. Richard Munkhouse, Vicar of Wakefield (*d.* 1811).

near Jamaica Row, Bermondsey, on the second Tuesday of the month.[10]

Of the Mercurians I have found no record except their advertisement for the James Street Theatre, 9 November 1741, when a performance of George Lillo's *The London Merchant* was billed as a "Concert . . . Boxes, 2s. 6d. Pit 1s. 6d. Gallery 1s. To which will be given gratis, the Tragedy of GEORGE BARNWELL . . . To which will be added the Comedy Part of The SPANISH FRYAR. By Desire of the Honourable Society of MERCURIANS. For the Benefit of Mr. Spackman, A Brother of that Society."[11] It is entirely possible that this was a lodge of physicians, taking its name from the Roman god Mercury, who in Roman Art is seen holding a caduceus and a purse.

Perhaps the year 1741, one which produced numerous announcements of Masonic theatre attendance, was the time when anti-Masonic fervor reached its peak. This was the year when the "Scald Miserables" first came to public attention. Their controversy raged through the London streets and in the newspapers. Such a name was given to a group of persons who planned and carried out at least two public processions mocking Freemasonry. In his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 1787, Sir John Hawkins describes how Paul Whitehead was one of those responsible. "In concert with one Carey, a surgeon, he planned and exhibited a procession along the Strand of persons on foot and on horseback, dressed for the occasion, carrying mock ensigns and the symbols of Freemasonry; the design of which was to expose to laughter the insignia and ceremonies of that mysterious institution; and it was not until thirty years afterwards that the Fraternity recovered from the disgrace which so ludicrous a representation had brought on it."[12] That Hawkins was in error as to the extent of the damage inflicted on the Masonic Lodge will be apparent when we learn on good authority that there were 116 active lodges in the City of London on 1 October 1797.[13]

The *London Daily Post*, 20 March 1741, carried the following account of the "Scald Miserables" fracas:

Yesterday, some mock Freemasons marched through Pall Mall and the Strand as far as Temple Bar in procession; first went fellows on jackasses, with cows' horns in their hands; then a kettle-drummer on a jackass, having two butter

[10] Jones, p. 311.

[11] *London Stage 3*, II, 941.

[12] P. 336.

[13] Jones, pp. 309-12.

firkins for kettle-drums; then followed two carts drawn by jackasses, having in them the stewards with several badges of their order; then came a mourning-coach drawn by six horses, each of a different color and size, in which were the Grand Master and Wardens; the whole attended by a vast mob. They stayed without Temple Bar until the Masons came by, and paid their compliments to them, who returned the same with an agreeable humour that possibly disappointed the witty contriver of this mock scene, whose miserable misfortune is that, though he has some wit, his subjects are generally so ill chosen that he loses by it as many friends as other people of more judgment gain.

Undisturbed by such criticism from the press, the "Scald Miserables" made another Grand Procession in mockery of a feast in Freemasonry on 27 April 1742. Details of this second attempt have been preserved in an engraving by A. Benoist, who gave it the title, "A Geometrical View of the Grand Procession of the Scald Miserable Masons, designed as they were drawn up over against Somerset House in the Strand, on the 27th day of April, Anno 1742."[14]

Mackey sums up the affair by saying: "The historical mock procession of the Scald Miserables was, it thus appears, that which occurred on April 27, and not the preceding one of March 20, which may have been only a feeler, and having been well received by the populace there might have been an encouragement for its repetition. But it was not so popular with the higher classes, who felt a respect for Freemasonry, and were unwilling to see an indignity put upon it."[15] He quotes the *Freemasons' Magazine*, 1858, whose correspondent reports: "The contrivers of the mock procession were at that time said to be Paul Whitehead, Esq., and his intimate friend (whose real Christian name was *Esquire*) Carey, of Pall Mall, surgeon to Frederick, Prince of Wales. The city officers did not suffer this procession to go through Temple Bar, the common report then being that its real interest was to affront the annual procession of the Freemasons. The Prince was so much offended at this piece of ridicule, that he immediately removed Carey from the office he held under him."[16]

Captain George Smith writes that "About this time (1742) an order was issued to discontinue all public processions on feast days, on account of a mock procession which had been planned, at a considerable expense, by some prejudiced persons, with a view to

[14] A copy of this engraving is in T. Begue Clavel, *Histoire pittoresque de la franc maçonnerie et des sociétés anciennes et modernes* (Paris, 1842). Mackey states that Benoist published a key with the original engraving and that the Clavel copy agrees with that key (see Mackey, p. 784, for this key).

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] I, 875.

ridicule these public cavalcades."[17] In any event, the custom of public processions on the feast days of Freemasonry was officially discontinued by the Grand Lodge of England in 1747 and finally effected in 1757.[18]

Late in the century there appeared the last and most often advertised of the anti-Masonic groups—at least I have reason to believe it un-Masonic[19]—the Grand Order of Bucks. Theatrical notices of this group extend from 1769 to 1773 and appear annually in terms of benefit performances at Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres for members of this fraternity. On 15 April 1769 the brethren gathered at Drury Lane for a performance of Isaac Bickerstaffe's *The Maid of the Mill* and James Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, the entertainment capped by Thomas King's speaking of his own epilogue, *Bucks Have at Ye All*. While this performance was a benefit for Jefferson, a member of the Drury Lane company, the playbill advertised the program "By Desire of the most noble Grand, Vice Grands, Council and Brethren of the ancient and honourable Order of Bucks belonging to the Euphrates Lodge."[20]

All other notices of the Order of Bucks are for performances at Covent Garden Theatre "By Order of the Grand Buck." On 15 May 1770 a performance of Otway's *The Orphan* and Charles Coffey's *The Devil to Pay* is "for the benefit of Mr. Wignell and Mr. Barnshaw."[21] That Wignell and Barnshaw were members of this order is evident from their benefit shared again the following season. On 10 May 1771, for *The Maid of the Mill* and George Colman's *The Deuce is in Him*, the advertisement reads: "By Order of the Grand Buck. Benefit for Wignell and Barnshaw. Places will be kept in the Boxes for the Brethren of the Most Noble Order, who are desir'd to meet the Grand Buck and his Council at the Shakespeare's Head, in the Great Piazza, Covent Garden: by Five o'clock, in order to proceed from thence to the Theatre in Procession."[22] Two seasons later Wignell again plays his benefit, this time

[17] *The Use and Abuse of Freemasonry: a work of the greatest utility to the Brethren of the Society, to Mankind in general, and to the Ladies in particular* (London, 1783), p. 78.

[18] Jones, p. 273, gives the date as 1747; Mackey, p. 784, says 1757.

[19] Of the 116 Masonic lodges in London in this period, none is named "Euphrates." The terms *Grand, Vice Grand, Council*—these are not ordinarily associated with authentic Freemasonry.

[20] *The London Stage: Part 4: 1747-1776*, ed. George Winchester Stone, Jr. (Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), III, 1398; hereafter cited as *London Stage 4*.

[21] *Ibid.*, III, 1477-78.

[22] *Ibid.*, III, 1548.

with one Davis, on 20 May 1773. After billing *King Richard III* with Arthur Murphy's *The Citizen*, the evening is further described as "By Order of the Grand Buck for the Benefit of Wignell and Davis. N.B. Places will be kept in the front boxes for the brethren of the Most Noble Order, who are desired to meet the Grand Buck and his Council at the Shakespeare's Head in the Great Piazza, by 5 o'clock, from thence to proceed to the theatre, and bring the ensigns of the Order with them."[23] These brethren may have been anti-Masonic, but their record proves them theatre buffs as well as Bucks.

There remain but two groups to be accounted for. And in trying to explain the difference between these certified Freemasons known as the "Ancients" and the "Moderns," we need only to know that thirty-four years after the historic meeting at The Goose and Gridiron a rival Grand Lodge of England came into being. This new body, originating outside of the City of London, lost no time in proclaiming that its members adhered more closely to what was believed to be "the ancient usages" than did their brethren in the older Grand Lodge in London. It insisted that it was in reality the "Ancient" Grand Lodge, dubbing the earlier body a "Modern" Grand Lodge. And so the newspapers wrote of them, so did the controversy rage over many years, all to the confusion of the general and generally amused public. But the "Ancients" were to add still another puzzlement—at times they permitted themselves to be known also as "Athol Masons," because their Grand Master was the Duke of Athol, in whose family the office of Grand Master was kept until 1813. After this date the two old Grand Lodges ceased to exist and member lodges became the United Grand Lodge of England.[24]

Such is the rather complex background against which can be traced the patronage of London theatres by Freemasons, would-be Masons, and anti-Masonic bodies. Through almost a hundred years it is apparent that lodges were quite powerful in the Covent Garden district, some of them being "theatrical lodges" whose members were professional actors or other funtionaries of the two Patent theatres and also the "minor" houses. Evidence of interest in theatrical matters, attendance at performances, active support of actors' benefit nights, even the staging of their own productions of favorite plays, appears season by season. And finally we are rewarded by

[23] *Ibid.*, III, 1725.
[24] Mackey, p. 284.

a view of the whole fraternal contagion in an apotheosis of fraternalism in a pantomime, the only professional piece English dramatists gave to Freemasonry.

Emmett Avery in discussing the audiences of the early century writes of various disruptive groups in an increasingly middle-class theatre environment. But he adds significantly: "On the other hand, the Free Masons became a peaceful group within the playhouses."[25] It is my contention that the various Masonic and even anti-Masonic groups already described did much by their attention to the theatrical scene to crystallize and keep before Englishmen the ideals of a middle-class population wanting to be reminded of virtues it professed to have and maintain. Such groups prepared a climate in which the various stage and audience reforms which Garrick and his fellow managers desired were ultimately successful.

On a typical Freemasons' night at the theatre, a prologue and an epilogue were certain to be announced as "suitable to the Occasion." There is ample evidence that these occasional pieces proclaimed such a reliance upon "virtue" and seemly behavior that, for the Freemasons, disorders could only arise during the performance when instigated by non-Masonic persons. The following Prologue, while we cannot assign it to a particular occasion, is typical of the public image these gentlemen sought to maintain.

When Heaven's eternal Architect began
To frame that noble superstructure Man,
His plan he laid with wisdom all divine,
And power Almighty fill'd the great design:
An outward form he gave, throughout complete,
Where strength and softness, pow'r and beauty meet;
Where native majesty maintain'd her throne,
The fair, tho' faint, resemblance of his own:
A front erect the Godhead to adore,
To view his work and tremble at his pow'r:
And in this frame a godlike soul he plac'd,
With reason, knowledge and discernment grac'd.
Alike his goodness did to all dispense
A due proportion of directing sense.
One only gift there still remain'd behind,
But for the few, the chosen few design'd;
'Twas sacred Masonry, that crown'd the whole,
And to a nobler height exalts the soul.
Of this great art the secrets to obtain,
Mankind for ages past have strove in vain:
In vain shall strive—till lawfully acquir'd,
The noble truths we teach their breasts have fir'd—
Yet to th' unlearn'd thus far let it be known,
Our darling secret's Honesty alone:
Howe'er thro' depths or mysteries explor'd,
Still Virtue is our grand, our master word:

[25] *London Stage 2*, II, clxii.

In that great secret centers all our art,
For each good man's a Mason at his heart.[26]

Surely, after such a beginning, unseemly conduct in the theatre would be unthinkable! And throughout the century, while the words may change from occasion to occasion, the essential message is always the same. If the speaker of prologue or epilogue happens to be the leading-lady of the evening, a Mrs. Pritchard or a Mrs. Bellamy, then into this lady's mouth is placed the same ritualistic assurance as to the uprightness of the Order, and usually the assurance that these very ladies and their friends will be safe and proud in the arms of any member of this fraternity.

George Anne Bellamy spoke the following Epilogue on a Masonic evening:

Well, here I'm come to let you know my thoughts;
Nay, ben't alarm'd, I'll not attack your faults;
I'm in good humour, and am come to prattle;
Han't I a head well turn'd, d'ye think, to rattle?
But to clear up the point, and to be free,
What think you is my subject?—Masonry:
Tho' I'm afraid, as lawyers cases clear,
My learn'd debate will leave you as you were.
What think you, ladies, e'nt it very hard,
That we should from this secret be debarr'd?
How comes it that the softer hours of love,
To wheedle out this secret fruitless prove?
For we can wheedle when we hope to move.
What can it mean, why all this mighty pother,
These mystic signs, and solemn calling brother?
That we are qualify'd in signs is known;
We can keep secrets too, but they're our own.
When my good man first went to be a Mason,
Tho' I resolv'd to put the smoother face on;
Yet, to speak truly, I began to fear
He must some dreadful operation bear;
But he return'd, and on his face appear'd
A pleasing smile that ev'ry scruple clear'd.
Such added complaisance, so much good nature,
So much, so strangely alter'd for the better,
That, to increase the mutual dear delight!
Wou'd he were made a Mason ev'ry night.[27]

And knowing George Anne, we are certain that she lost no time delivering the lines of insistent moral glorification, but rather hastened to the *double entendre* of the final ten lines. And yet such lines are mild in suggestiveness when compared with the Epilogue Mrs. Horton had to speak much earlier in the century.

[26] Jones, pp. 181-82. Later playbills and newspaper accounts often refer to "*The* Freemason's Prologue" or Epilogue (italics mine). In a study of many such set-pieces I have not found one designated as official or by custom so marked for delivery.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Where are these hydras? Let me vent my spleen—
Are these Free masons? Bless me! these are men!
And young and brisk too: I expected monsters,
Brutes more prodigious than Italian songsters.
Lud! how report will lie! how vain's this pother!
Are these like sparks who only love each other!
Let easy faiths on such gross tales rely,
'Tis false by rules of physiognomy;
I'll ne'er believe it, poz, unless I try.
In proper time and place, there's little doubt,
But one might find their wond'rous secrets out.
I shrewdly guess, egad, for all their shyness,
They'd render signs and tokens too of kindness;
If any truth in what I here observe is,
They'll quit ten brothers for one sister's service.
But hold, wild fancy, whither hast thou stray'd?
Where man's concern'd, alas, how frail's a maid!
I came to storm, to scold, to rail, to rate,—
And see, the accuser's turn'd the advocate.
Say to what merits might I not pretend,
Who, tho' no sister, do yet prove your friend:
Would beauty thus but in your cause appear,
'Twere something, Sirs, to be accepted there:
[*Pointing to the boxes.*
Ladies be gracious to the mystic arts,
And kindly take the gen'rous Masons' parts;
Let no loquacious fop your joys partake,
He sues for telling, not for kissing sake:
Firm to their trust, the faithful Craft conceal;
They cry no roast-meat, fare they ne'er so well:
No tell-tale sneer shall raise the conscious blush,
The loyal brother's word is always, "Hush."
What tho' they quote old Solomon's decree,
And vainly boast that thro' the world they're free,
With ease you'll humble the presumptuous braves,
One kind regard makes all these freemen slaves.[28]

A charming instance of a Masonic Prologue spoken outside London is the one written by Richard Gardiner, Esq., to be spoken by Mrs. Dyer, "before the Play of 'Love for Love,' performed by Desire of the Great Lodge at Swaffham, Norfolk, May 6, 1765." I include it in its entirety because of the references to one of the most outrageous of anti-Masonic bodies, "Scald Miserables."

While royal splendor and theatric state
On princely Barry and king Garrick wait,
How little can we hope an humble stage,
Void of all pomp, can your applause engage!
For which among you ladies can discern
A Covent Garden in a Swaffham barn?
Yes, 'tis a barn—yet, fair ones, take me right,
Ours is no play—we hold a lodge to-night!
And should our building want a slight repair,
You see we've friends among the brethren there.
[*Pointing to the Masons on the stage.*
Reply the Scalds with miserable frown,

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

"Masons repair! they'd sooner pull it down.
A set of ranting, roaring, rumbling fellows,
Who meet to sing "Old Rose and burn the bellows."
Champaign and Claret, dozens in a jerk;
And then, O Lord, how hard they've been at work!
Next for the secret of their own wise making,
Hiram and Boaz, and Grand Master Jachin;
Poker and tongs! the sign! the word! the stroke!
'Tis all a nothing, and 'tis all a joke.
Nonsense and nonsense! let them storm and rail,
Here's the whole hist'ry of their mop and pail.
For 'tis the sense of more than half the town,
Their secret is—a bottle at the Crown."
But not so fast, ye enemies to light;
I tho' no Mason, am their friend to night;
And by your leaves 'tis something strange I trow,
To slander that which none of you can know.
We women, tho' we like good Masons well,
Sometimes are angry that they will not tell:
And then we flaunt away from rout to rout,
And swear like you, we've found the secret out.
But O! vain boast! to all enquiring eyes,
Too deep the mine where that bright jewel lies.
That Masons have a secret is most true;
And you, ye beauties, have a secret too.
Now if the Masons are so rigid grown,
To keep their secret to themselves alone,
Be silent in your turns, 'tis that allures:
Silence! and bid the Masons find out yours.
Thus far conjecture in the comic way,
But let not Fancy lead your thoughts astray.
The ties of honour only Masons bind;
Friends to each other and to all mankind:
True to their king, and for their country bold,
They flew to battle like their sires of old,
Banish'd the trowel for the barbed spear,
And where loud cannons thunder'd form'd the square.
Gallant and gay at Minden's glorious plain,
And the proud Moro storm'd, alas! in vain!
In peace with honest hearts they court the fair,
And most they triumph when they triumph there.
Their actions known, their bitt'rest foes approve,
For all that Masons ask is—*Love for Love*.[29]

From the playbills and newspaper advertisements from 1728 through 1776 we learn something of the regular affinity Freemasonry shared with London theatres, and here and there appear notices upon which reasonable conjectures can be made. From such evidence we surmise that, whether "Ancient" or "Modern," many actors were members of the Fraternity; that certain lodges were "theatrical lodges" (whose members were employed in some capacity in Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and/or such "minor" theatres as the Little Theatre in the Haymarket; Goodman's Fields; the New Wells, Clerkenwell; the Old Tennis Court in James Street, Southwark); that Masons in general supported their brother Masons'

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 183-85.

benefits; that on feast-days and other important occasions a lodge or lodges were accustomed to entertain the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England, together with his officers, in a night at one of these playhouses; and that lodges were constantly resorting to benefit performances in "support of distress'd" brethren or other citizens, their widows and orphans. Most performances listed as "At the particular Desire" of Freemasons usually called for Masonic singing and other entr'acte features.

Three London lodges of Freemasonry almost certainly appear to have been what I have termed "theatrical lodges"—Shakespeare Lodge No. 131, meeting in Covent Garden (Theatre?) on the fourth Thursday from November to May (roughly comprising the theatrical season at the Patent theatres); the Lodge of the Nine Muses No. 330, meeting at the Thatched House Tavern, St. James's-street, the second Friday of each month, and Apollo Lodge of Harmony, meeting at the Argyle Arms, Argyle-street, on the second Friday of the month.[30] In addition to these, undoubtedly many actors preferred membership in lodges not confined to their professional interests, and these would be scattered over the city. Such was certainly the case on occasions in which announcements request brethren to meet at a nearby tavern or coffee-house before going in a body to the playhouse.

That such activity was beneficial to the theatres and their companies is underscored by the number of benefit announcements for brother actors or "distress'd citizens." At Drury Lane, Saturday, 19 April 1729, a benefit was performed for William Mills and his wife. That Masons were supporting actor Mills is evident from the added announcement that "the Free-Mason's Prologue and Epilogue" were to be spoken, and that select pieces (Masonic songs and dances?) would be performed between the acts.[31] Unfortunately, there is no record of the box-office receipts for this gala evening. In fact, perhaps because of better "security measures," there are no records of accounts for any publicized Freemason benefits. What information is available is derived from accounts of anti-Masonic bodies such as the Grand Order of Bucks. On the benefit evening already mentioned, when the Bucks supported Brothers Wignell and Barnshaw (Covent Garden, 15 May 1770), Wignell's tickets amounted to £61 13s. (Box 76; Pit 187; Gallery 146) and

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.
[31] *London Stage 2*, II, 1027.

Barnshaw's £116 8s. (Box 96; Pit 500; Gallery 174).[32] At the same house, 20 May 1773, Bucks attended for Wignell and Davis. On this night Wignell had ticket income of £78 4s. (Box 82; Pit 290; Gallery 142), which Davis nearly matched with £74 4s. (Box 59; Pit 281; Gallery 173).[33] From such receipts we can surmise that these "Brethren" were equally loyal to their actor friends in fraternities, whether Freemasons or not.

But the heart of Freemasonry in the eighteenth century is revealed in the enjoyment of entr'acte features of song and dance with a fraternal significance. It is between the acts of mainpiece and afterpiece that we catch glimpses of the warmth of these evenings at the theatre. On 4 May 1736 Drury Lane bills announced Aphra Behn's *The Rover* with Henry Fielding's *The Mock Doctor*, as a benefit for the actor Shepard. The remainder of the bill was "Singing. I: *The Enter'd Prentice's Song: Come let us Prepare.* III: *On, on my dear Brethren.* V. *Sing then my Muse.* Dancing. I: *Mason's Dance* by Delamayne. . . . For the Entertainment of the Grand Master, and the rest of the Brethren of the . . . Masons."[34]

What the *Mason's Dance* was is perhaps beyond recall. However, *The Enter'd Prentice's Song* has been preserved by Stephen Jones, "corrector of the press" for William Strahan, King's printer, and later for printer Thomas Wright.[35]

Come let us prepare,
We brothers that are
Assembled on merry occasion,
To drink, laugh, and sing;
Be he beggar or king,
Here's a health to an accepted Mason.

The world is in pain
Our secrets to gain,
And still let them wonder and gaze on:
They ne'er can divine
The word or the sign
Of a free and accepted Mason.

'Tis this, and 'tis that,
They cannot tell what,
Nor why the great men of the nation
Should aprons put on,
And make themselves one
With a free and an accepted Mason.

Great kings, dukes, and lords,
Have laid by their swords,
Our myst'ry to put a good grace on;

[32] *London Stage 4*, III, 1477-78.
[33] *Ibid.*, III, 1725.
[34] *London Stage 3*, I, 579.
[35] Jones, pp. 23-24.

And ne'er been asham'd
To hear themselves nam'd
With a free and accepted Mason.

Antiquity's pride
We have on our side,
To keep up our old reputation;
There's naught but what's good
To be understood
By a free and an accepted Mason.

We're true and sincere,
And just to the fair,
Who will trust us on any occasion;
No mortal can more
The ladies adore
Than a free and an accepted Mason.

Then join hand in hand, (*Standing.*
By each brother firm stand,
Let's be merry, and put a bright face on;
What mortal can boast
So noble a toast
As a free and accepted Mason. } *Chorus 3 times.*

At the third act intermission was sung what was known in Freemasonry as "The Deputy Grand Master's Song."[36]

On, on, my dear brethren, pursue your great lecture,
Refine on the precepts of old architecture;
High honour to Masons the Craft daily brings,
Who are brothers of princes, and fellows of kings.

We drove the rude Vandals and Goths off the stage,
Reviving the art of Augustus' fam'd age;
And Vespasian destroy'd the vast temple in vain,
Since so many now rise where our principles reign.

The noble five orders, compos'd with such art,
Will amaze the fix'd eye, and enagage the whole heart;
Proportion's sweet harmony gracing the whole,
Gives our work, like the glorious creation, a soul.

Then, master and brethren, preserve your great name,
This lodge so majestic will purchase your fame;
Rever'd it shall stand till all nature expire,
And its glories ne'er fade till the world is on fire.

See, see, behold here, what rewards all our toil,
Invigorates genius, and bids nature smile:
To our noble Grand Master let bumpers be crown'd,
To all Masons a bumper, so let it go round.

Again, my lov'd brethren, again let it pass,
Our ancient firm union cements with the glass:
And all the contention 'mong Masons shall be,
Who better can work, or who better agree.

In this "Deputy Grand Master's Song" is the Freemason's published image—a group dedicated to the principles of fraternity and of the

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

Augustan Age's conception of its mission. All of which underscores Basil Willey's description of the early century: "Glory and loveliness may have passed away, but so also have the fogs and glooms of history; the common daylight which now descends upon a distracted world may be prosaic, but at least it is steady and serene, and has not yet become dark with excessive light. . . sanity, culture, and civilization had revived; and at last, across the vast gulf of the monkish and deluded past, one could salute the ancients from an eminence perhaps as lofty as their own. . . ."[37]

At the fifth intermission came the grand musical finale in the singing of "The Grand-Warden's Song," programmed as "Sing then my Muse."[38]

Let Masonry be now my theme,
Throughout the globe to spread its fame,
And eternize each worthy brother's name;
Your praise shall to the skies resound,
In lasting happiness abound,
And with sweet union all your noble deeds be crown'd.

And with sweet, *&c.*

Chorus. Sing then, my muse, to Masons' glory,
Your names are so rever'd in story,
That all th' admiring world do now adore ye.

Let harmony divine inspire
Your souls with love and gen'rous fire,
To copy well wise Solomon your sire;
Knowledge sublime shall fill each heart,
The rules of g'ometry to impart,
While wisdom, strength, and beauty, crown the royal art.

Cho. Sing then, my muse, *&c.*

Let faithful Masons healths go round,
In swelling cups all cares be drown'd,
And hearts united 'mongst the Craft be found;
May everlasting scenes of joy
Our peaceful hours of bliss employ,
Which Time's all-conqu'ring hand shall ne'er destroy.

Cho. Sing then, my muse, *&c.*

My Brethren, thus all cares resign,
Let your hearts glow with thoughts divine,
And veneration show to Solomon's shrine;
Our annual tribute thus we'll pay,
That late posterity shall say,
We've crown'd with joy this happy, happy day.

Cho. Sing then, my muse, *&c.*

Both the "Enter'd Prentice's Song" and the many choruses of "Sing then, my muse" indicate that on such a grand evening the

[37] *The Eighteenth Century Background* (London, 1949), p. 1.
[38] Jones, pp. 46-47.

entire audience must have been caught up into the entertainment, including even the non-Masonic spectators in pit, box, and galleries. Such a night undoubtedly would prepare all London to enjoy the public processions for and against the Freemasons. And how the shilling gallery must have loved it!

In the "minor" theatres it was not unusual to find Masonic groups entertaining themselves and their ladies. At the Great Theatrical Booth, Bowling Green, Southwark, 18 February 1743, a "Concert of Music" was performed in two parts (Boxes 3s. 6d. Pit 2s. 6d. 1st Gallery 1s. 6d. Upper Gallery 1s.), and between the two parts "a Comedy, call'd *Love for Love* (By a Company from the Theatres-Royal, for their Diversion) . . . To which will be added a Farce, call'd *The Lying Valet* . . . With several other Entertainments." All this was for the benefit of Laguerre and Boaman, who announced in the *Daily Advertiser*, 16 February 1743, that "Those worthy Brethren who have agreed to favour us with a Visit that Night, are desir'd to come uncloath'd."

In addition to benefit purses, there is evidence that Masonic connections could produce striking artistic rewards for theatre folk. At a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* given at the Haymarket, 28 December 1751, "The parts to be performed by a Company of Gentlemen for their Diversion. With an *Occasional Prologue.* Also *Lethe.*" Again the evening is announced as "a Concert" and, of course, "By Desire of the . . . Masons . . . Benefit of a Brother under Misfortunes." What is interesting is the added announcement that, "The new Scenes, which were painted for the Gentlemen who presented this Tragedy last Winter at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane will be made use of."[39] And since the latest *Othello* at Drury Lane Theatre prior to this Haymarket evening was the famous "amateur night," 7 March 1751, in which Sir Francis Delaval and his family produced the tragedy for the diversion of their friends, it is quite evident that Masonic connections reached into high places indeed!

More proof as to the permanence of the Freemasons in their continued influence and popularity in London theatres comes from quite late in the century. In 1797 an oratorio, *Solomon's Temple,* was frequently sung, and at Covent Garden Theatre, 29 December 1780, a pantomime was produced called *Harlequin Freemason.* While the libretto of *Solomon's Temple* has been preserved, we have

[39] *London Stage 4*, I, 281-82.

no record of its professional performances except one evening at "the Philharmonic Room, in Dublin, for the Benefit of sick and distress'd Free-Masons. The Words by Mr. James Eyre Weeks. The Music composed by Mr. Richard Broadway, Organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral."[40] Concerning the pantomime, however, there is a fulsome record of its scenario.

In addition to an extended account of *Harlequin Freemason* in *The Lady's Magazine,* Supplement for 1780,[41] this Covent Garden production was one of the high points in theatre-going for an American visitor, Judge Samuel Curwen of Boston, Mass. The Judge saw it soon after it opened, 9 January 1781, a matter of twelve days. While the Harlequinade itself was certainly not to the taste of Judge Curwen, he did enjoy the grand procession with which the pantomime was concluded.

The Lady's Magazine's critic appears to have been a Freemason, as will be noted in the following account:

> A new pantomime obviously prepared with great pains, and at great expense, was performed, December 29, at Covent-Garden Theatre, for the first time, under the title of Harlequin Free-Mason. To give the reader any tolerably intelligible idea of a representation so mixed, so incongruous, and generally so unconnected as a modern pantomime, is at all times a difficult and frequently an impracticable attempt; but when a pantomime is founded on masonry, it must strike every observer, that as the essence of the entertainment is avowedly wrapped in mystery, the difficulty must be doubled, and that none but a brother of the art can unfold, and explain the ceremonies of the night. Without attempting to display any knowledge and skill in masonry (for we are determined not to betray any of the secrets of the art) we shall proceed in the plainest and most homely language to describe the works of the first evening, performed in the grand lodge of Covent-garden Theatre.[42]

While the critic warns that "The pantomime part of this entertainment is light and rather thinner of business than usual," he seems grateful that "The story . . . is more intelligible than in many preceding pantomimes." And after rehearsing details of plot in the Harlequinade and complimenting Messers. Richards, Carver, Hodgins, and French for the admirable scenery, he writes about the grand procession.

> The procession (the idea of which is evidently taken from the procession in Mr. Garrick's entertainment of the Jubilee) is as grand and splendid a theatrical pageant as ever was seen, since pageantry became the vice of the stage; and when we say this, we are aware that we speak boldly.

There follows a complete and carefully annotated schedule of events. However, Judge Curwen's account is more vivid and personal, more

[40] Jones, pp. 112-18.

[41] I am indebted to Professor Ralph G. Allen, University of Pittsburgh, for calling my attention to this article.

[42] Pp. 698-702.

to the purpose of this investigation.

When the Bostonian attended *Harlequin Freemason* on 9 January 1781, he wrote afterwards in his diary:

> Accompanied Mr. Dalglish to C.G. Theatre; comedy, Busy-body,—entertainment the tasty performance of Freemason procession,—scenery pompous, former part to my taste unpleasing—Harlequin in dumb show; why he is said to be a freemason, I cannot divine, unless investing him with a square, one of their badges, suspended by a ribbon and hung round his neck, so constitutes him. . . . These species of pantomime seem at present greatly in vogue; to arraign the taste is perhaps conceited; but this remark will never come to light, if ever, till I dare say, it will be despised as it is now relished, especially by the more enlightened class; as to the lower, they ever were and ever will be too gross for any entertainment above the lowest humor. . . .[43]

After more words of condemnation for the taste of Londoners, Curwen gets down to the business of describing the grand procession.

> . . . After the silly harlequin had skipped behind the scenes, a most grand procession began, preceded by a standard of light red color, the ground of all the following ones! the first contained a scroll whereon was painted in large golden letters, ENOCH, the first grand-master; his representative following, accompanied by two attendants; at a little interval appeared, NIMROD, second grand-master, with his representative and four attendants; next was brought the front of the temple of the Sun at Thebes; afterwards, the great pyramid of Egypt and the sphynx; then, front of the temple of Jerusalem, built by King Solomon; Pharoah's two daughters next followed, attended by their Egyptian and Jewish female and male servants, the high-priest properly habited, holding a pot of incense in his hand,—breast-plate, and other insignia on,—closing with a long stream of attendants and servants in rear; next, front of Pantheon at Rome, the founder or repairer, for it is uncertain which, M. Agrippa's name in a list under the capital; then, temple of Jerusalem, built by Herod, destroyed by Vespasian, represented as in flames; next, William the Conqueror, and behind him was carried a prospective view of the tower of London, as if built by him; then, Edward the Third, accompanied by his son clad in black armor, from thence denominated the Black Prince,—giving liberty to, and taking the chains off the legs of two captive kings, John of France, and James II. of Scotland, at the instance of his son, followed by a train of attendants; the front of St. Peter's at Rome then succeeded, Julius II. having in his hand a crosier; and on his head a triple crown,—alluding to his regal authority: he was attended by a train of ecclesiastic officers and servants, and had the keys hanging to his girdle, as lord chamberlain of the state-rooms in the upper regions, and jailor in the lower dungeons. . . .
>
> Next in order came Queen Elizabeth, dressed in royal robes, and attended by her servants, both state and domestic; then followed King James, surrounded by court sycophants; front of banqueting-house as it now stands, undefiled and undilapidated; next, Guy Fawkes, in dress of his day, holding a dark lantern, —alluding to the gunpowder plot,—he was forcibly seized and carried off; next followed Inigo Jones, the restorer of Greek and Roman taste in architecture, preceded by an ensign, having his name in a scroll, with the masonic letters D. G. W.; then came Charles II. and attendants, followed by the front of St. Paul's, the present noble structure, founded in his reign; at length appeared William and Mary, the former holding a sheet of paper with this inscription, Bill of Rights,—words that I wish could be indelibly impressed on the minds of kings, lords, commons, courtiers, and people of this island; for, on the practical remembrance of this short sentence, depends the security of this unparalleled constitution, which I verily fear is near its dissolution. Then followed

[43] *Journals and Letters of Samuel Curwen, 1775-1784,* ed. G. A. Ward (New York, 1842), p. 299.

the grand-master, seated in a magnificent alcove; then an arch, having an inscription, *Ancient Masonry;* then two pillars, on the top of each a globe,—on one the celestial, the other a terrestrial,—and on a list, by which they were kept steady, was inscribed *Modern Masonry.* The last in the procession were Solomon and Pharoah's daughter, seated on a throne of state, and over it a rich canopy raised by six steps; on the bottom steps, on each side, stood two lions guardant, between them two young Egyptian damsels, dressed in white,—and on each side of the throne, all the principal personages of the procession ranged, with standards displayed, made a grand and glittering appearance. A fine chorus was sung, and when ended, a universal shout of applause rang through the house, and the curtain dropped.[44]

Despite the ups-and-downs of rebirth and a faction-ridden infancy, the craft of Freemasonry appears to have survived the eighteenth century in strength, put down or adopted its adversaries, and in *Harlequin Freemason* foreshadowed the final union of *Ancient* and *Modern* in 1813. In the pantomime's grand procession may be seen most of the important dogmas of Neo-Augustanism stoutly defended by a body of men intent upon singing the pleasures of Virtue and their devotion to God and the Throne. Thus Freemasonry remained an increasingly important adjunct of the playhouses, encouraging the arts, supporting actors and persons in distress, impressing audiences by its own example of decorum, admiring itself in stage, box, pit, and galleries, and—enjoying play-going immensely!

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 299-301.

James Thomson's Revisions of *Agamemnon*

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There are marked differences between a manuscript version of Thomson's *Agamemnon* in the Larpent Collection of the Huntington Library and two later printed versions. Since these differences reveal something of the genesis of Thomson's second tragedy and the process of its revision, the three are interesting to compare. The earliest version is the Larpent 4 copy, entitled "The Death of Agamemnon," submitted to the Licenser by Charles Fleetwood on January 14, 1737 / 8; the next is the first printed edition published by A. Millar on April 24, 1738; and the third is Thomson's final version for Vol. III of *The Works of James Thomson in Four Volumes Compiled with his Last Correction, Additions, and Improvements,* also printed for A. Millar in 1752, after Thomson's death.[1] From an examination of the three texts, it is evident that Thomson extensively revised Acts II through V of his manuscript play before its first publication on April 24, 1738. Since this edition differs only slightly from the corrected and evidently final version in the *Works* of 1752, this paper will be primarily concerned with the revisions between January 14, when the manuscript play was submitted for approval of the Licenser, and April 24, when the first edition was printed.

Agamemnon (note that already the title is changed) was first performed at Drury Lane Theatre Royal on April 6, 1738,—a Thursday night, and again on April 7, 8 (the normal benefit performance), 10, 15, 18 (another benefit performance by command of

[1] The three versions of *Agamemnon* used in this paper (Larpent 4, 1738 ed. and 1752 ed.) were all examined at the Huntington Library, where the author had a research grant in the summer of 1963. The Huntington Library copy of the 1738 ed. is Dev. HC 5 from the Kemble-Devonshire Collection. According to John Edwin Wells, "Thomson's *Agamemnon* and *Edward and Eleanora*—First Printings," *Review of English Studies,* XVIII (1942), 478-86, the ledger of Henry Woodfall, printer for A. Millar, Thomson's publisher, lists three entries: (1) April 24, 1738—*Agamemnon;* (2) April 28, 1738— 2nd ed.—*Agamemnon;* (3) August 26, [1744]—*Agamemnon* and *Edward and Eleanora,* paged as Vol. II of Thomson's *Works.* According to Wells, all three settings agree verbally, so that Thomson's major revisions discussed in this paper must have occurred before the first printing (April 24, 1738) which was advertised in the *Daily Advertiser* for April 25 as "This day is published . . . with the Prologue printed entire."